Annual Report 2014/15

www.durham.gov.uk/laf
Contents

1. LAF Purpose and Goals 3

2. Map of area covered by County Durham Local Access Forum 4

3. Chairman’s Foreword 5

4. Members of the Forum 6-9

5. Dates of Meetings 10

6. Business of the Forum 10-12

7. Highlights of 2013/14 13-15

8. Contacts 16
Purpose
County Durham Local Access Forum (LAF) is a statutory body created under the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000. It is independent of the Authority. The Countryside and Rights of Way Act states that the purpose of the LAF is:-

- To advise Durham County Council and others on the improvement of public access to the land in the County for the purpose of the open-air recreation and enjoyment of the area and other prescribed matters.
- In carrying out its function, the LAF will have due regard to the needs of land management and conservation of the natural beauty of the area.

Goals
County Durham LAF will champion the improvement and management of access to meet all users' needs, be respectful of land management, promote responsible use and enable participation in healthy outdoor activity. County Durham LAF will work together to objectively advise Durham County Council and others and will make recommendations for the improvement of public access in County Durham.
Area covered by County Durham Local Access Forum

County Character Areas

© Crown copyright. All rights reserved Durham County Council LA100049055
Chairman’s Foreword

If you read this brief report of the activities of the Local Access Forum over the last year it will give you a flavour of our work and the range of topics relating to outdoor access that we have endeavoured to influence. Not a lot you might say but I would naturally disagree!

Each of the topics covered required contributions from colleagues in the Forum in order to shape and hopefully improve outdoor access. I should like to take this opportunity to thank them for giving up their time.

Free at the point of delivery (a bit like the NHS) access to the outdoors in County Durham contributes to a wide range of agendas. It is a key contributor to health and well-being of those people within our communities who choose to venture along our footpaths and bridleways or take advantage of the many areas of access land shown on ordnance survey maps of the county. Our open spaces also contribute to the wider social and economic well-being of the County hopefully encouraging inward investment and generally making County Durham a nice place to be!

It is easy to undervalue access to the countryside and when resources are tight to put the priorities elsewhere but the LAF works hard to support the individuals and organisations, particularly officers in the County Council who continue to strive to improve our environment.

If anyone reading the report feels that they could play a part in improving access in County Durham and would like to learn more about the work of the LAF or perhaps even join us at one of our meetings then please do get in touch via our Secretary, Jill Errington at laf@durham.gov.uk

Geoff Hughes
Chairman Durham County Local Access Forum
## Members of the Forum

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Geoff Hughes</td>
<td>Other</td>
<td>Chairman of the Countryside Recreation Network, Vice Chair of Northumberland Sport and a Board member of the 3 Rivers Local Nature Partnership. Geoff is a keen cyclist and fun runner.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Roger Cornwell</td>
<td>User</td>
<td>Vice-Chairman of the City of Durham Trust and the Crossgate Community Partnership. Roger represents walkers and is a former Footpaths Officer for the Durham Group of the Ramblers. He chairs both the City of Durham Trust and the Crossgate Community Partnership. His particular interests are in defending and extending the rights of way network in the County, and believes the Access Prioritisation Project is an important way to achieve this in the present economic climate. He has taken the lead getting the County to dedicate some of its land as Access Land under the terms of the CROW Act. He is also the LAF’s “Huddle Champion”. Huddle is a web-based forum run by DEFRA where staff from DEFRA and Natural England, and LAF members across the country, can exchange views and information. Roger retired from the LAF at its AGM in July 2015.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>David Maughan</td>
<td>Landowner</td>
<td>A farmer in south west Durham and represents landowner/occupier interests through his involvement in the National Farmers Union.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brian Hodgson</td>
<td>Landowner</td>
<td>Lives in central Durham and is an experienced landowner and farmer, as well as having been involved in several landowner groups.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Neil Gander  User
Neil is a freelance journalist with a particular interest in mountain-biking, having written a guide to the activity within County Durham, as well as being a keen walker and a former voluntary ranger.

Jim Welch  Other
Jim is involved with a number of organisations representing blind and partially-sighted people, and other disability groups, including being the founder and chairman of Blind Life in Durham.

Neil Foster  Councillor
Neil is currently the Durham County Council Cabinet Member for Regeneration and Economic Development. This role includes strategic transport, the built environment and tourism. Neil is also a board member of Visit County Durham, the local area tourism partnership. He contributes to the role of ensuring that the work of the Forum is linked in to the wider County strategic role.

Eddie Tomlinson  Councillor
Eddie is currently the Durham County Council Cabinet Member for Assets, Strategic Housing and Rural Issues and this involves being the Council’s Rural Champion. He also represents the Council on the Heart of Teesdale Landscape Partnership, the Limestone Landscape Partnership and North Pennines AONB Partnership. He contributes to ensuring that the work of the LAF is linked in to the wider County strategic role.
**Tom Bolton**

Before early retirement Tom was a local government officer with experience of rights of way and other statutory orders as well as common land and village green issues. As a scrutiny officer he supported projects looking at environmental issues including countryside and coastal access. Currently Clerk to two Parish Councils in County Durham, he is on the Board of Teesdale Action Partnership; and co-opted member of the County Council’s Environment and Sustainability Scrutiny Committee.

**Geoffrey Rigden**

Geoff is a semi-retired teacher living in the Beamish area and has been involved in outdoor pursuits for many years both professionally and personally. He was a member of Sedgefield Countryside Group for many years, working to enable and maintain access in that area. He is a regular user of the extensive ROW system in the Derwentside area, and enjoys running, walking and cycling.

**Ray Partridge**

Ray works for HM Courts and Tribunals Service but is also a Parish Councillor and a former member of Derwentside Trust for Sport and Arts. He is a volunteer for Durham Wildlife Trust and is a keen cyclist, walker and runner.

**Angela Johnson**

Angela lives in central Durham and worked as a business analyst. She is an active horse rider and owner, competing in long distance riding for the past 20+ years, and was on the Committee of the Northumberland Durham Group of the Endurance Horse and Pony Society for many years. Angela is a volunteer for the British Horse Society and has been Assistant Access and Bridleways Officer for East Durham since the late 1990s.

**Robin Trounson**

Robin is a retired police officer. He is a keen walker and takes an active interest in facilitating recreational access to local attractions for the elderly and people with disabilities.
Ian Gray
Ian is a voluntary ranger with over thirty years’ service in County Durham and is a walks leader for DCC. He is also Vice-Chairman of Environment Committee for Great Aycliffe Town Council.

Definition of Member Interests:-

Users
Users of local rights of way or open access land (eg walkers, horse riders, cyclists and carriage drivers)

Landowners
Owners and occupiers of access land or land over which local rights of way subsist

Other
Any other interests relevant to the appointing authority's area.
Dates of Meetings 2014/15

The Forum met on the following dates:
- 7 April 2014, County Hall, Durham
- 30 June 2014, Seaham Harbour Marina
- 6 October 2014, County Hall
- 19 January 2015, County Hall

Business of the Forum

- Support and advice on review of the Rights of Way Improvement Plan (ROWIP2) in conjunction with Durham County Council (DCC) Officers
- Continuing to pursue dedication of further areas of County Council land for open access
- Commented on Natural England dedication of Derwent Gorge and Muggleswick Woods
- Regional Co-ordination/Chairs and Vice Chairs meetings
- Active participation in the Access Prioritisation Project – providing support, advice and feedback.
- Received updates on the County Durham Cycling Strategy
- Received presentation and commented on draft Heritage Coast Management Plan
- Received presentation on East Durham Equine Study
- Responded to DEFRA consultation on improvements to the Policy and Legal Framework for Public Rights of Way
- Received updates on the draft County Durham Plan
- Received updates on 3Rivers Local Nature Partnership
• Received updates on Heart of Teesdale Landscape Partnership

• Attended Paths for Communities Flatts Wood Celebration Event

• Received updates from Natural England

• Received Natural England Newsletters and Coastal Access Newsletters

• Received updates on progress with the establishment of the National Trails Partnership

• Attendance at meetings of the North Pennines Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty Partnership Access and Recreation Working Group

• Continued to look at membership recruitment opportunities including drafting an article for inclusion in future edition of County Durham News

• Working with Health
  – attendance at meetings of the Healthy Weight Alliance Group and appointed member to Public Health, Cycling and Active Travel Group
  - received presentation on the draft Healthy Weight Framework for 2014-2020

• Received updates on Monitoring of Engagement with the Natural Environment (MENE)

• Received notification of open access restrictions

• Responded to consultations on open access restrictions

• Completed LAF Annual Survey

• Completed questionnaire of the ‘Future of Forestry’

• Commented on proposed Dog Control Order on Seaham Beach

• Discussed the feasibility of reinstating The Heritage Way and appointed a lead member as point of contact

• Attended the inauguration of The Locomotion Way
• Supported Natural England dedication of Derwent Gorge and Muggleswick Woods

• Revisited DCC Scrutiny Reviews Access to the Durham Coast and Access to the Durham Countryside

• Attended event and responded to Government consultation on proposed Walking and Cycling Strategy

• Received updates from the Rights of Way Team

• Common Land – pursuing the establishment of a DCC Working Group to consider developing policies for the management and protection of Common Land

• Site Visit to footpath and level crossing at Easington Colliery. Secured commitment from Network Rail to carry out works to improve safety at the crossing.
Highlights

Level Crossings

In June 2014 members of the Forum visited a section of the England Coast Path and looked at a link path which crosses the coastal railway line. Concerns were expressed that the crossing had no boarded surface to facilitate easy pedestrian access over the two tracks, and that the safety situation was exacerbated by the location on a curve with restricted visibility northwards. Representations were made to Network Rail and assurances received that the crossing would be upgraded by means of boarding. The LAF continues to take an interest in the wider agenda of potential closures of level crossings.
Coastal Access

The Durham/Hartlepool/Sunderland stretch of the England Coast Path was formally opened on 11 April 2014, and the Local Access Forum have continued to take an interest in the wider issues of access to the coast, particularly for equestrian users.
On 20 September 2014 members of the Forum attended the opening of the Locomotion Way, a brand new 2 mile permissive multi-user route on Network Rail land linking Shildon (and the National Railway Museum) to Aycliffe.
Contacts

Secretary
Jill Errington
Legal & Democratic Services
Durham County Council
Telephone: 03000 269703
Email: jill.errington@durham.gov.uk

Access & Rights of Way Team Officers
Mike Ogden (Team Leader)
Access & Rights of Way Team
Durham County Council
Telephone: 03000 265331
Email: mike.ogden@durham.gov.uk

Audrey Christie
Senior Rights of Way Officer (Training, Enforcement & Caseload)
Access & Rights of Way Team
Durham County Council
Telephone: 03000 265332
Email: audrey.christie@durham.gov.uk

Travel Planning Team Officers
Victoria Lloyd
Sustainable Travel Officer (Rights of Way Improvement Plan, Cycling Stategy & Projects)
Travel Planning Team
Durham County Council
Telephone: 03000 265311
Email: victoria.lloyd@durham.gov.uk

Forum Website (Contains Minutes of all meetings and Annual Reports):

www.durham.gov.uk/laf

The Forum would like to thank the Officers for their continued support.